

James River Reserve Fleet Completes First Dredging Project Of the Boat Basin and Entrance Channel in More Than 30 Years

**By Martin Walker
James River Reserve Fleet**

Every day, the channel between the fleet and MARAD's James River Reserve Fleet (JRRF) facility serves as a conduit for people and equipment servicing the fleet. Stretching over half a mile from the pier to the main river, the entrance channel and boat basin are vital to operations. Without the use of the channel, the extra distance to the nearest port would add an additional two hours to each round trip to the fleet. However, silting over the past 37 years caused the channel to become too shallow for the larger craft to enter without the risk of grounding.

Dredging displaces the silt and mud that accumulates on the river bottom, but the dredging process can pose a hazard to the environment unless done properly, which is why the process is heavily regulated.

Since the last time dredging was done at the basin in the late 1960's, many environmental laws and regulations affecting dredging have been put into place. The JRRF and South Atlantic Region (SAR) began the dredging permit process several years ago. After extensive studies, sediment testing and public comment periods, permits from both the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ) and Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMR) were granted in the fall of 2005.

Obtaining the required dredging permits, although important, was only one step in the process. Contracting, mobilizing equipment and the actual dredging also can be a time-consuming process. Unfortunately, it was feared that the dredging could impact the migration of some of the James River's fish if it were to continue any later than March 31, and therefore needed to be completed before that date. Working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE), MARAD completed the contracting process and awarded the contract in less than 60 days to ensure that the dredging could finish before the March deadline imposed by the VMR permit.

Dredging began in early February 2006, with the goal of removing nearly 200,000 cubic yards of material from the channel bottom. To

put that into perspective, that amount of material would be equal to an area the size of a football field and the height of a 10-story building. To ensure the material is safely removed and preserve water quality, the dredge pumped the material through 15,000 feet of pipeline to an above-ground storage area. The project increased the channel depth to 13 feet deep by 100 feet wide, which will now allow the largest of the JRRF fleet craft to enter the boat basin.

The success of this project was the result of teamwork on the part of the JRRF, SAR, USACOE and the dredging contractor. Without the



Dredger with Unit 4 of the "Ghost Fleet" in the background at the James River Reserve Fleet.

Photo by Martin Walker

hard work of all involved, the project would not have gotten started, and would certainly not have been completed on time. The completion of the dredging project will ensure that the JRRF facility can remain safely navigable and a valuable resource for many years to come.

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Publisher
Julie Nelson

Managing Editor
Susan Clark

Editor
Ella Thomas